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C O N F I D E N T I A L LAHORE 000314

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/6/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PK](#) [PTER](#)
SUBJECT: GOVERNOR TASEER KEEPS PUNJAB CHIEF MINISTER ALERT

CLASSIFIED BY: Clinton Taylor, Acting Principal Officer,
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REASON: 1.4 (b)

11. (C) Summary: In response to a series of critical letters that Punjab Province Governor Salman Taseer sent to Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif in November, Punjab Law Minister Rana Sanaullah circulated incriminating photographs depicting Taseer and his family as un-Islamic. Although the leaders of the two political parties calmed emotions on both sides, the ongoing feud demonstrates Taseer's role as a Pakistan People's Party (PPP) thorn in the side of the Punjab provincial government, pricking the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PMLN) without toppling the coalition. The political drama, however, has dented the already not-so-clean reputation of Taseer, and by extension the PPP, while Sharif has taken the high road and let his proxy Sanaullah argue on his behalf. Ultimately, the exchange has sustained the tension between the two political parties' efforts to compete with each other and rule together in a coalition provincial government. End Summary.

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Taseer's Letters to CM Ruffle PMLN Feathers
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12. (SBU) In an effort to rile the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PMLN)-dominated provincial government, Punjab Governor Salman Taseer sent Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif three letters in the first two weeks of November that criticized the PMLN's efforts. According to news reports, one letter directed the provincial government to hold a long-delayed cabinet meeting and appoint a prosecutor general to improve the judicial process. Another letter, responding to an incident in which the Punjab government removed doctors allegedly blamed for the deaths of patients, warned the Chief Minister against harassing medical professionals. Punjab media interpreted the letters as a challenge to the competency of the provincial government and cited it as further evidence of Taseer's ongoing attempts on behalf of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) to dethrone the PMLN.

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Letters Prompt Mudslinging from PMLN
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13. (C) Responding to the letters, Punjab Law Minister Rana Sanaullah held a press conference November 19 in which he blasted the private life of Taseer and his family, and distributed photographs showing Taseer's "loose" lifestyle. The photos, which several contacts received by email and media reports noted were at least two-years old, show Taseer drinking alcohol; his son drinking wine and lounging on a beach with bikini-clad women; and his daughter swimming in a pool with men and wearing shorts during physical education class at the Lahore American School. Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PMLQ) affiliated attorney Chaudhry Fawwad Ahmed told poleconoff December 1 that he had seen videos showing worse behavior. "Everyone drinks

privately, but when you hold public office, this behavior is irresponsible, especially in a very conservative area," he said.

¶4. (C) The PPP fought back November 20, as provincial leader Rana Aftab Ahmed Khan denounced Sanaullah's defamation of Taseer's family. "Even the worst of enemies show respect towards each other's families," he declared. The PPP Members of the Provincial Assembly (MPA) further reminded Sanaullah that the "letters of advice" sent by the governor fall well within the constitution. Zardari added his complaints in a November 19 phone call to Nawaz Sharif, during which the President demanded that Sharif take action against Sanaullah and refrain from further attacks on the governor.

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Taseer's Reputation Dented
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¶5. (C) Ex-PMLN Member of the Provincial Assembly (MPA) Afzal Dogar, who continues to advise the Sharif family, explained to poleconoff November 19 that Taseer, who comes from a wealthy background, considers the Sharif clan "nouveau riche." At a time when the PPP and PMLN have few differences in policy, he noted, the photographs highlight the difference in "principles" between the parties. Taseer's "western playboy ways" clash with the PMLN's less secular and more conservative outlook, he contended. Raja Amir Khan, who contested an MPA seat in Sialkot for the PPP, told Poleconoff December 1 that Taseer "is freelancing" and called him a "political novice." Moreover, he noted, the governor has few ties to the PPP. Fawwad Ahmed also offered that Taseer's actions have "only benefited the PMLN."

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Sanaullah Says Governor is "Like a Brother"
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¶6. (SBU) Sanaullah reversed his position November 20, and announced in the Provincial Assembly that he treated Taseer like a relative. "The governor is like my brother, his daughters are like my daughters and his wife is like my sister," he told the Assembly. The PMLN, represented by Minister Chaudhry Abdul Ghafoor, also participated in a November 20 procession in Lahore marking solidarity with the Zardari government.

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Lingering Disagreements Remain
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¶7. (SBU) Despite the apparent reconciliation between the PPP and PMLN, Sanaullah resumed his complaints at a November 22 press forum, where he hinted that the PPP recognized that Taseer had overstepped his role. "We have settled issues with our coalition partners in the province, as the governor has no legal right to write letters to the provincial government," he explained. "He cannot advise the provincial government, and the government was not answerable to him, as it was only answerable to the Punjab Assembly." When a journalist showed Sanaullah a photograph of him with a glass of wine, he swore an oath that he does drink alcohol.

¶8. (SBU) Taseer also asserted his right to send the Chief Minister letters. He justified the letters under Articles 129 and 131 of the Constitution on November 25 as within his prerogative to ask for information about the administrative affairs and policies of the provincial government. He also told journalists November 30 that he will continue to exchange "love letters" with the Chief Minister. In fact, he told the press December 3 that he will soon send a letter protesting the treatment of students by the police in a December 2 clash at Punjab University.

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Comment: Differences Set Aside for Now, But Tension Remains
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¶9. (C) Taseer's continuous pricking of the provincial government serves as a reminder that the PMLN must continue to reckon with

the PPP as a provincial partner. Taseer's actions show that he has little fear of the Chief Minister, and that he stands ready to topple the government if President Zardari decides to make a political play for Punjab. In the meantime, Taseer can keep the provincial government on its toes, even though Sharif has earned growing popular support with his good governance policies.

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